

# So what the heck was that all about?

*Editor's note: In the following editorial, the author has written a fictional story, based on factual events, to give Qui Web members a better understanding of how their work impacted the mission at Cairo West and the Air Force.*

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"Well ... I don't know about you," said SrA. Max Tout, "but this Bright Star 01 didn't turn out to be ANYTHING like I thought it was supposed to be. Seems like sumthin' was goin' on, but I'm not quite sure what!"

"I hear ya, buddy," replied his sidekick, SrA. Pete Moss. "Part of me says we didn't accomplish Jack abdel Squat...but the other part of me says we were sure busier than we planned to be and it musta counted for something for somebody. Still, I'd sure like a peek under the tent into what we really did do here!"

"Hey, I got an idea!" tooted Tout. "Let's just go ask the good Major Eileen Forward, point blank, what really went on here!"

"No sweat, gentlemen," Major Forward nodded, when they approached her with the question. "I can give you an answer quicker than you can find a 'hot cocoa beverage' pack in the dining hall rummage box."

"You're right that this exercise finished up a whole lot different than what we planned. In some ways, the parts we originally thought were important ended up being a lot smaller and less complex than we'd expected; but in other ways, what we did here was a whole lot more meaningful than we'd have ever imagined in August. And if we look at the 'Big Picture,' we'll probably all end up realizing that this may well have been the most important and valuable

Bright Star in history!"

"Sounds like eyewash to me, Major," retorted Tout. "I'm gonna need to be convinced!"

"Okay, Mister Cynic! First, let's review 'What We Did!' We came here for an exercise. Figured we had three major jobs to do. Thought we'd first set up a team—the Tactical Airlift Control Element, or TALCE—to bring in the airplanes with our people and our gear, then build a tent city from scratch once we got enough folks to do that, and then finally we wanted to create a Combined Air Operations Center, or CAOC, to run the air war portion of Bright Star.

"Well, the TALCE did their job and we brought in enough stuff to stuff a Sphinx

here to do it! Then we turned Cairo West into THE most secure place in all of Egypt—and that's according to all the DVs who've come to visit since! Even the scorpions have to have ID badges to get into this place.

"Yeah, I was thinking a thousand years from now the only parts of Egypt that will still look the same will be the Pyramids and the Cairo West berms!" laughed Pete.

"Things were pretty tough at first," continued Forward onward. "Whenever we tried to get the gear we needed, like more CWDE, we were told we were 'just an exercise' and didn't have the priority the Enduring Freedom missions had. So it was pretty intense for a while. Eventually, we

convinced the folks back home that our bodies were just as vulnerable whether our orders were marked "Bright Star" or "Enduring Freedom."

"Man, was I glad when we finally got that *chem/bio* gear...funny how something that normally seems like a real pain to drag around suddenly becomes the most important thing in the world," mused Max. "I'll never deploy without full, well-fitting CWDE again!"

"Not to worry, Tout," replied Forward. "That's one of those things that changed on 11 September. From here on, you can bet we'll be making darned sure you're protected—even in an exercise deployment."

"But what about the actual Bright Star flying ops? I heard they were a lot smaller than most years." He may have been born Pete Moss, but he didn't let any of it grow on him. He'd been keeping his ears tuned to what was going on around him.

"Well, in some ways you're right," answered Forward. "But in other ways, we really accomplished more of what this exercise



Photo by TSgt. Dave Ahlschwede

before you could learn how to pronounce "Tutankhamon." Then, just as we were starting to put the pieces together to create Tent City, the entire world changed on us...forever. When the terrorists attacked America, the whole planet held its breath—but not for long. And neither did we. Suddenly our focus went from "playing in an exercise" to Force Protection—and what we saw wasn't rosy. We were a long way from home, with nothing but our wits and what we'd brought, and no easy way to get much more very soon. So we scrambled and put up Tent City in about two-thirds of the time we'd originally expected—with about two-thirds of the people we should have had

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